



**NATIONAL
INDIAN
GAMING
ASSOCIATION**

Rebuilding
Communities
Through Indian
Self-Reliance

Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association Honors Early Leaders in Indian Gaming

San Diego, Calif. – April 8, 2010 – The National Indian Gaming Association remembered its beginnings, and gave some of its highest honors to the early leaders in the Indian gaming industry, during the Chairman’s Leadership Awards Luncheon.

The Honorable Stanley R. Crooks, chairman of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, gave a 25th anniversary keynote address during the luncheon, in which he explained the importance of long-standing efforts to rebuild American Indian economies.

“If you don’t have the revenues you cannot protect sovereignty, and in these trying times sovereignty needs to be protected,” Crooks said.

Crooks said that NIGA was instrumental in fighting adversarial legislation during the advent of Indian gaming, and that NIGA’s work has helped to make gaming a major contributor to the economies of Indian nations. He also announced a \$100,000 gift of support from the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community to NIGA.

At the conclusion of the address, NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr. gave Crooks the Chairman’s Leadership Award and wrapped him a buffalo robe.

NIGA was founded in 1985 as the court case, *California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians*, wended its way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The court ruling issued in 1987 affirmed tribal sovereignty, and strengthened the ability to continue building their economies through tribal government gaming. Indian gaming-despite the current economy-has continued to provide jobs, basic government services and has become in 2010 a \$26.2 billion industry.

The awards luncheon now in its eighth year grew out of the NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr. commitment to recognizing meritorious service by individual leaders in the areas of gaming and business development. The luncheon was held Wednesday during the National Indian Gaming Association Convention. Stevens told the nearly 5,000 convention goers, “The chairman’s leadership award luncheon has evolved into a great event.”

Stevens gave the Chairman’s Entrepreneur of the Year Award to Dave Anderson, the founder of the NASDAQ-traded restaurant chain Famous Dave’s of America.

Anderson, who is Choctaw and Ojibwe, accepted the award on behalf of the early employees of the gaming industry, including the bingo hall managers, assistant managers and security staff in the

early days of Indian gaming. Anderson said, "If they hadn't risked their lives and their careers we wouldn't be here."

Stan Jones, 83, who served as chairman of the Tulalip Tribes for 44 years, received the Chairman's Lifetime Achievement Award for outstanding service to Indian communities, Stevens said. He called Jones, "A modern day hero, and a modern day warrior," as he announced the award. Jones, a World War II veteran, was appointed the chairman of the first Indian gaming task force assembled in the late 1980s by the U.S. Interior Department.

"We traveled all across Indian country letting the tribes know the benefits of the gaming," Jones said. "Everyone started with high stakes bingo, and then casinos."

He thought for a minute, then added, "Our land was sold or taken away from us; we had soap put in our mouths for speaking our Indian language. Now we have been buying land back on our reservation and we go into the schools and teach the kids our Indian language. And we pay full education for any tribal members who want to go to college."

Stevens gave the Chairman's Leadership Award to Rick Hill, chairman of the Oneida Nation in Wisconsin. Hill asked the audience, "Who is here from the 1993-1994 NIGA tour? We bonded on that magnificent tour that took us from coast to coast. We were saying, 'We need to get our act together to build this industry.'"

At one point in the early days of Indian gaming, Hill said, 49 of 50 governors were fighting against it, and Congress was considering legislation that went against the very fabric of Indian Country. But when the time came for hearings, 100 chiefs came to testify to the sovereign right of Indian nations and the profound economic needs across Indian Country.

"Chairman Crooks quietly gave us the money to run operations and start the organization (NIGA) as we see it today," Hill said. "I think for the future you will accomplish the mission of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which is to build strong tribal governments, economic development and self sufficiency."

NIGA Chairman Stevens, who is also Oneida, remarked, "Chairman Hill walked the walk, and fought the fight. He continues to do so from the front lines. We are so proud of our great leader."

Kurt BlueDog, who is Sisseton-Wahpeton, received the Chairman's Sovereignty Award from Stevens. BlueDog is the longest serving board member on NIGA's executive committee. He is an attorney in Minnesota and the Chief Judge of the Fond du Lac Reservation Tribal Court.

Also, during the luncheon, Chairman Crooks presented a donation of \$150,000 to the Native American Boys and Girls Clubs from the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community. Stevens applauded the donation, saying, "We must as Indian Country support our youth programs and services. We built an industry to provide a better future not only for ourselves but for the people who come after us. This is the legacy that Indian gaming is building."

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About the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) - The National Indian Gaming Association is a nonprofit trade association comprised of 184 American Indian Nations and other nonvoting associate member. The mission of NIGA is to advance the lives of Indian people – economically, socially and politically. NIGA operates as a clearinghouse and educational legislative and public policy resources for tribes, policymakers and the public on Indian gaming issues and tribal community development. For more information, visit www.indiangaming.org.